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THE LEAVES OF THE TREE*

BY ARTHUR C. BENSON

V—HENRY BRADSHAW

HENRY BRADSHAW was born in 1831. He came of an interesting stock. His father was a Quaker, and he was descended from the great banking family of the Hoares. His direct ancestor was a near blood-relative of the famous Regicide; "but my mother was a Stewart," he used humorously to add. He was educated at Eton, where he was known as a good-humored indolent boy, of high moral character, and with his own clearly defined pursuits. At Cambridge he did not distinguish himself in the prescribed studies, but succeeded to a King's Fellowship, and went for a time to be a master in St. Columba's School, near Dublin. The work was uncongenial to him, and affected his health prejudicially. He came back to Cambridge, took a College office, and held a subordinate post in the Library. In the course of the next twenty years he made himself one of the most erudite of bibliographical authorities, and in 1867 accepted the Librarianship. This post he held with marked success for twenty years. He took few holidays, and most of his work was done in helping other scholars. He died suddenly in his rooms in 1886, at the early age of fifty-five.

Such is the bare biographical outline of a life that would seem at first sight to be not only destitute of events, but of most of the possibilities of human interest; to resemble, indeed, the career of a worm that burrows in a dusty folio, measuring its progress not even by pages traversed, but by pages pierced, and leaving no trace of its passage from volume to volume but a little sprinkling of outpoured excavation. Yet, as a matter of fact, it would be hard to find a life more widely and firmly knit with other lives. Not only was Henry Bradshaw one who by a sort of genius of friendship established direct relations with a constant and in-

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creasing succession of friends of all ages, but even his very pursuits, narrow and academical as they sound, formed both the scene and material for the same multiplication of intimacies. In fact, his studies were mainly attractive to him because of the links which they afforded him with the personalities of the past, or for the sake of those in the present on whom he might lavish the most unsparing help. His life, indeed, suffused as it was with tranquil charm and romantic affection, casts a vivid light upon all those mysterious figures of the past whose effect upon their contemporaries seems wholly out of proportion to the slender materials with which they worked or the quality of their actual performance. It may safely be said that of all the Cambridge men of his time there was no one who was regarded with a more loving respect, or whose death made a more sharply felt gap in so many generations. There was no one on whom his friends more depended for a certain unchangeable regard, an affection which was both ardent and restrained, and a perfect loyalty which never shrank from absolute candor, and yet never failed to make the fullest allowance for temperament. Bradshaw was not a faultless man: he was indolent, fastidious, even whimsical; but he had a depth and a force of nature which is more than rare, a magnanimity which was wholly unaffected and instinctive. He was sensitive without jealousy, and though he loved details, he never lost sight of the great outlines and mainsprings of humanity.

I fear that I am not in the least degree capable of appreciating and still less of criticising the value of his bibliographical and archaeological work. It is certain that he held a foremost position in the bibliographical world. Much of his erudition was buried in his note-book, in scattered jottings and phrases, and much of it is embodied in the completed researches of other scholars. He was constitutionally incapable of finishing work on his own account, but he had not the least particle of jealousy or personal ambition in him. He was only too ready to give away the results of his investigation, and he did not care for recognition. In bibliography he was a sort of Sherlock Holmes, with an amazing instinct for seeing the drift of a problem, and of balancing and applying details in the right place. Everything that he observed in the course of his researches threw light on some other problem that was floating in his mind.

This is hardly the place to amass instances of his amazing delicacy of observation and the incredible "coincidences" which assisted his efforts. He had the faculty of keeping an enormous number of small points in his mind, and of focussing them all upon the detail under consideration. He knew the history of a book or a manuscript at a glance, and eyes, ears, and nose alike contributed their share of information. He extracted out of the bindings of books fragments of manuscript glosses which extended philological knowledge; he had a genius for discovering in libraries books that had been supposed to be missing for many decades, and were masquerading in new bindings and under erroneous titles. He did this mostly by the not very reccondite process of looking at the insides of books instead of the outsides, which seems to be the habit of librarians; and his marvelous luck came to the assistance of his skill, his patience, and his knowledge. I have never myself been able to rate the *value* of bibliographical exploration very highly from the point of view of its services to literature or history. It seems to me to be the exercise of a highly delicate and artistic gift, and the pleasure derivable from it to be on a par with the pleasure derivable from any other kind of fine connoisseurship. Bradshaw was, I think, a very subtle and a very fortunate connoisseur. He himself admitted that bibliographical work was dry and tedious; but it amused him, and he confessed that it was his greatest pleasure; while it was the human element in it which throughout attracted him. "My province," he once wrote, "is to give help on certain details which most people don't care about." And again he said: "The most interesting thing to me is not so much finding particular books, as tracing the history—the individuality of great libraries which have come down to the present time."

But what is the most remarkable fact about a man who accomplished so large an amount of erudite work, in addition to much administrative and deliberative business, both in his College and in the University, is that what he did was almost entirely done without effort, and because he liked it. It was so all through his life: as a boy and as an undergraduate he could not do the prescribed work. At Eton, instead of preparing a lesson, he would spend the time in tracing a word in the dictionary through its derivations. At Cambridge, as an undergraduate, he would for days read

nothing but novels. Later in life there were several great subjects which he had more or less constantly in hand—the editing of Chaucer, the history of typography, early Irish literature, medieval liturgiology. Yet he completed nothing. He could not work under compulsion; when he ought to have been doing one thing he took up another. He could not make himself do anything. He was often approached by editors to write them special articles, and he sometimes undertook to provide them. But it generally proved almost impossible to get the work out of him. It was partly an extreme fastidiousness and a dislike of coming to any conclusion unless he had ransacked all possible records; but it was partly a constitutional indolence, and an inability to force himself to drudgery. He was well aware of this failing. He often confessed it, and never condoned it. He once deplored his inability to write French, saying that he was one who had a supreme love for the literature and language of France, but not enough energy to master the simplest elements of grammar. “It has been my curse all through life,” he once wrote, “that I want the power or gift, or whatever you like to call it, of *finishing* what I work at, and all the minute research in the world is only rendered more hopeless by this one failing.” But it was this consciousness of a stubborn weakness which made him so tolerant of others’ faults. He knew exactly what moral effort could do and what it could not do. He said once frankly that he had never been able to work at anything which did not amuse him; but this must not be held to apply to his administrative work, which was always faithfully done. Indeed, it is curious to find that this indolence of temperament and incapability of finishing co-existed in him with an extraordinary instinct for method—for seeing the way in which an institution ought to be organized, a set of complicated accounts kept, a statute or a set of regulations drafted. And it is the fact that he left his mark—and an indelible one—on both his University and his College in such matters, and that his influence as a counselor and administrator was real and wide.

The same fact comes out, strangely enough, in his relations with his friends and family. He used to give pain and cause misunderstanding by his inability to answer letters; indeed, he sacrificed one of his tenderest and most emotional friendships to this habit, sending no reply to reiterated letters of the most affectionate entreaty and re-

monstrance. It seems impossible to analyze exactly his feeling on the point. He suffered acutely, he confessed, under the idea of the unanswered inquiry, the slighted affection; but this could not make him act. In one so tender, so faithful, so laborious, it is impossible to think of this as a mere perversity; it must have been almost a malady of will, some mechanical suspension of volition. No one ever accused him of any lack of love or failure of dutifulness; and yet this strange fiber of impotence lies across his character, as a thing which he pathetically deplored but seemed unable to alter.

Henry Bradshaw's name was familiar enough to me as a small boy. He was my youngest brother's godfather and the donor, in that capacity, of an envied silver cup. Of the ten friends of my father who were sponsors to his children, he was the only one who was not a clergyman.

I remember well his first appearance in our circle. He arrived at Lincoln, where my father was then a canon, on a sudden visit, I should think in 1874. He was then about forty-three years old. He arrived late one evening, when we children had all gone to bed. We were full of curiosity about him, and on coming down to breakfast we saw, observed, and instantly approved.

There came into the room, solidly, quietly, and imperturbably, a short, stoutly built, plump, clean-shaven man, in a serviceable suit of gray. His hair, cut very short, bristled over his big round cranium. I fancy that he had small side-whiskers. His head was set rather low on his shoulders and thrown slightly backward by his upright carriage. Everything about him was solid and comfortable; he filled his clothes sturdily, and his neat short-fingered hand was a pleasant one to grasp. His small eyes were half closed, and a smile half-tender, half-humorous, seemed to ripple secretly over his face, without any movement of his small but expressive lips. We were presented to him, and he held our hands for a moment in his own, repeating our names in a way which gave us a pleasing sense of immediate and permanent relationship to him. My father's delight in his company was as obvious and patent as his respect for his guest. I understood from that moment that he was a man of dignity and importance, and though the allusiveness of his talk was beyond our comprehension, dealing much with undergraduate reminiscences, yet it was plain that he was

not a mere pomposity. His humor had something darting, subtle, charmingly malicious about it, and yet all the time his tenderness and his emotion were obvious and visible.

I saw him again some years later, when I was an Eton boy. It was in the summer of 1878 that I was coming up from the playing-fields, and near the gateway into the cloisters, under Lupton's Tower, I saw my old friend standing with the present Vice-Provost of Eton, Mr. Cornish, then one of the masters. I saluted him, and was too shy to claim Bradshaw's acquaintance; but Mr. Cornish called to me, and said to Bradshaw, "Here is a friend of yours, I think—Benson." Bradshaw gave me a quick radiant smile and held out his hand, saying, "Of course—Martin!" This was the name of my elder brother, who had died at Winchester earlier in the same year. I did not speak, and I suppose I looked confused. Bradshaw himself at once recognized the mistake, and I could see that he was extremely distressed at what he had inadvertently done. He put his arm through mine, and presently took me off to the College Library with him, where he was at work, talking quietly and affectionately about my father and mother, and then showing me some interesting things in the Library, as if to obliterate the painful impression of his involuntary mistake.

When I came to go up to King's as an undergraduate in 1881, my father took me to see him in his rooms. They were on the first floor in the front court, just beyond the Hall, and had a private back staircase, which came down into the kitchen passage. He greeted me very warmly and kindly, holding my hand for a minute in his, and giving it a little flick with his fingers as he did so, which came to be so characteristic a greeting. "Mind," he said to me as I went away, "I want you to be at home in these rooms, and to come to see me at any time: you will be always welcome, for your father's sake"—and then he gave me a little smile, darting a quick and kindly glance at me, and added, "and for your own!" They were great big rooms, with two large parlors, looking north and south, and a bedroom. They were heterogeneously furnished, without any attempt at taste or indeed of comfort, with books and papers all about—a strange mixture of order and disorder. Most of the pictures and ornaments had some association connected with them, which he could generally be induced to relate. On Sunday evenings he was usually at home, and held quiet,

vague receptions, people coming and going and joining the circle, where the talk was of the easiest. But better still were the times when one found him alone. I remember one summer day his meeting me in the court. It was very hot weather, and I was in flannels. "What are you doing?" he said... "Are you supposed to be working? Why not come and work in my rooms?—I shall not interrupt you." I took a book and ensconced myself on his sofa, while he sate writing at the table, every now and then glancing up with a smile, as if pleased to have me with him. Then he sent for some luncheon, and we lunched together. Then we decided it was too hot to go out, so we read and talked until tea-time, when he gave me tea, and we strolled afterward to the Fellows' Garden and sate there in the dusk. I do not know how he established, as he did, the peculiar feeling of intimacy and affection. It was done by manner and look rather than by speech, and by establishing little absurd secrets, such as children might have, which he never forgot. For instance, he used to have hanging on his watch-chain a charm in the shape of a tiny silver tankard. I once made some silly objection to the incongruity of this, and he seldom failed, in talking to me, to cover it with one hand, saying, "I mustn't forget you think this degrading!" He had a way, too, of leading one on to tell him all about one's home-doings and domestic incidents, so that it became natural to inform him of anything that happened, and to consult him if there was any friction. I remember that my father once objected to my accepting some invitation to a circle of which he did not approve. I took the letter—a long, anxious, and tender document—to Bradshaw, and told him the story. He read the letter and said: "Of course, you think that your liberty is being interfered with. Don't you see, you goose, that it is worth anything to have a father who cares about you like that?" I did see it, in a flash, and felt a goose indeed!

When I had a disappointment in my Tripos, and took a lower place than I had expected, he came in to see me. "I know—I understand," he said. "Of course, you are disappointed, and so am I. But depend upon it, these things mean something, and it is our business to find out what they mean. They don't happen merely to annoy us."

I got into the way, with the easy egotism of youth, of referring all sorts of trivial matters to him—squabbles, mis-

understandings, worries, fears, as well as hopes, pleasures, new friendships, successes. It was very tempting, because he always seemed, and indeed was, so much interested in the details, and his comments were not professional or hor-tatory, but purely sympathetic. He was tolerant, I used to think, of everything but coarseness, meanness, and intellectual pride. He could not bear airs of superiority; and I have seen him pour cold water in public on priggishness with a liberal hand. He had a way, if I made any remark to him savoring of contemptuous judgment of another, of pushing up the tip of his nose with his finger to indicate the *nasus aduncus*. I would hasten to explain, covered with ingenuous confusion, that I was the most tolerant of human beings. "Oh, of course, of course. That's the misfortune of having a high standard. Poor So-and-so is not quite . . . quite correct? He hasn't the advantage of being an Etonian, like you and me!"

One of the most curious things about him was his habits, or rather his absence of habits. Sometimes for days together he would be secluded in his rooms, only going to and from the Library, and eating a meal, generally of tea and bread and butter, at any hour of the day or night. Sometimes he would be up early, sometimes lie in bed half the morning. He took, in my time, very little exercise, but occasionally he would tricycle or go for long walks. He seemed to have no settled occupations and no fixed hours for work; but he hardly ever took a holiday, and his series of note-books, in which he wrote down every kind of miscellaneous facts, grew steadily. He was always ready to undertake any amount of congenial investigation for other people, while he could seldom bring himself to attend to any work of his own. One most characteristic thing about him was, that if one ever consulted him on a point of antiquity or erudition, he had always just stumbled upon the answer in the course of some other investigation. These "coincidences," which were always happening, filled him with extreme delight. The reason was that he had an immense and varied stock of knowledge in his mind, and never forgot anything, so that any question extracted illustrative facts. I once traveled up to London with him, and pointed out a big house on the outskirts of London, with a large garden, which was being demolished to make room for some suburban houses. "Yes," he said, "I used often to go and play there

when I was a child." A few minutes later we passed an old church, the tower of which rose from a weltering mass of new streets. I called his attention to it. "Yes," he said, "I was christened there. What a coincidence!"

He was a familiar figure on Sundays in King's Chapel. He sat in the Senior Fellows' stalls on the right of the choir, his big head poised on his shoulders, enveloped in a full surplice. He always wore the old non-regent M.A. hood of black silk, with the white lining removed, which is now used by holders of the B.D. degree. He had a trick of taking off his hood in the court after Chapel, and carefully folding it up into a neat package. But the most familiar impression of him is as he walked in the morning in cap and gown with slow leisurely steps to the Library, along the front of the Fellows' Building and round the west end of the Chapel, with his note-book clasped to his chest. He suffered from long fits of what he called "grumpiness." "It's no use—I won't stop to talk; I am grumpy to-day." I used to inquire what was the matter. "Oh, I don't know" (with a sigh). "*People* are so tiresome; it's my own sinfulness, no doubt!" But, as a rule, he was extraordinarily equable and cheerful, and kept his moods and his ailments to himself. He was very variable about correspondence. On one occasion, when he was traveling in France, he wrote to me two or three times a week. At another time nothing would extract an answer from him. He was unable at times to return any answer to an invitation, and it is a well-known anecdote how a friend of his, who had invited him to dinner and could get no reply, sent him two post-cards, addressed to himself, on one of which was "Yes" and on the other "No." Bradshaw posted them both. But he was forgiven everything and allowed to do exactly as he pleased. If he did come, people were delighted to see him; and if he did not, it was Bradshaw, and he was privileged.

His personal influence was extraordinary. It was not gained by any arts, nor did he ever manifest the slightest wish to interfere or to exercise influence. One just knew him to be a man of guileless life, laborious, high-principled, incapable of any sort of meanness or malice. To love is to understand everything, says the French proverb. It is not easy really to improve people by scolding them or lecturing them, but if one knows that a generous, unsuspecting, high-minded man has a real affection for one, it is impossible not

to be restrained by the thought from acting in a way that he would disapprove. Bradshaw's influence over the men he knew was stronger than the influence of any man at Cambridge. But his affection was sisterly—if one can use the word—rather than paternal. He was fond of little demonstrations of affection, would pat and stroke one's hand as he talked, and yet there was never the least shadow of sentimentality about it. I remember that a friend of mine told me that he had once kissed Bradshaw's hand when he said good-by to him, on an occasion when Bradshaw had shown him even more than his usual kindness. "I am not the Pope," he said, bluffly, but the offender felt that he was pleased. He had a way of picking a flower, if one was with him, and sticking it into one's buttonhole, which had something gently caressing about it. Indeed, his affection for his friends had something really romantic about it. There is a letter in his *Life* which says to an undergraduate friend that he is tempted to think about him continually, and to write him too often. And yet I have never heard any one suggest that there was anything weak or unmanly about his tenderness. It was preserved from that by his critical judgment, his excellent sense, his power of saying the most incisive things, and the irony which, however lambent, had got a very clear cutting-edge, and which he was always ready to use if there was occasion. If any one traded on the affection of Bradshaw or counted on indulgence, he was sure to be instantly and kindly snubbed. It was more that there was an atmosphere of intimacy and confidence in one's relations with him, which pervaded the time spent in his company as with fragrant summer air.

He loved directness in everything. He spoke again and again of his admiration of the men who used their energy on doing the best work they could, rather than on decrying the work of others, which he believed to be a disabling fault of Cambridge. He hated intrigues and manœuvres, and maintained that the best and most effectual form of diplomacy was to tell your opponents your reasons for disagreeing with them. So, too, in his handling of life he detested casuistry, and believed that if things went wrong, the truest and manliest solution was to be ready to believe it was your own fault rather than the guile of others. It may be thought that this arose from fearlessness and freedom from morbidity. Fearless he certainly was, but, on the other hand,

he was almost morbidly sensitive. He could not bear hostility or even coldness. He once did an elaborate and voluntary piece of work with reference to the Bodleian. The then Librarian, Mr. Coxe, received the results with what Bradshaw thought was ungracious indifference. Bradshaw threw the papers he had prepared into the fire, and confessed that he never took any real pleasure in the Bodleian again.

But it remains a very difficult matter to analyze the charm of a life which had so little that was calculated or dramatic about it. It is very hard to say what it is which makes a man what may be called a *figure*, a distinction which appears to fall so fortuitously on men of no brilliance or predominance, and to miss so completely and unquestionably men of far higher powers and attainments. Some men achieve that particular prestige by an unconsciously artistic handling of their materials, some by an innate picturesqueness, some by a kind of secret fragrance of spirit, a balanced consistency of life. There is a charm about the exhibition of simplicity in a great position, but there is a still more potent charm about the exhibition of greatness in a simple position. There have been famous bibliographers who have had their reward, and there have been men of deeply emotional nature who have been faithfully loved by their friends; but the remarkable thing about Bradshaw is to note the passionate desire on the part of his friends to acclaim his greatness on grounds which, in the case of an ordinary personality, would only justify a moderate degree of eminence in a small and limited sphere of technical knowledge. I do not at all wish to belittle the excellence of Bradshaw's work—its range was considerable, its quality was supreme; but no man can be heroic in bibliography, and we must look elsewhere for the secret of the ineffaceable impression he made upon his friends. The secret lies in the quality of the man's soul. In the region of affection he had a natural kingship. To put one's own petty heart in touch with his was to feel oneself enveloped by something deep and pure and lasting. If the individualities of men do indeed survive, and if, in the world that lies beyond our limited perceptions, personal intercourse, however transformed and enlarged, is possible, then I feel for myself, and I do not doubt that other friends of Bradshaw feel it too, that one will be met and welcomed and received by that sweet and gentle spirit with the same

tenacity and tranquillity of affection which he so often gave us in the old unforgotten days. I do not exaggerate when I say that to be with him on one of those quiet evenings in the scented dusk of the College garden, with its screening foliage and its winding ways, with the flowers glimmering in the bordered turf, was like floating in a boat on a silent moving tide. The man was always there, behind his labors and anxieties, and infinitely greater than them. I am not attributing to him any close intellectual grasp of intricate problems, any vast mental horizon; but what he had was an immense vitality of affection, a power of loving—not selfishly or desirously, not for any comfort or luxury of emotion that he might gain, but simply because his heart was deep and wide. He did not condone one's faults or weakly overlook them; he simply took you as you were, and because you were just that and nothing else, and dear to him so. He did not appraise or justify, remember or forget. He simply loved his friend as the father in the parable loved his prodigal son, because he loved him, and for no better reason.

ARTHUR C. BENSON.